

The Citywide Rezoning Bulletin



City of Cambridge Community Development Department, the Citywide Growth Management Advisory Committee, and the Planning Board

A Plan for the Future of Cambridge

This bulletin describes the Citywide Rezoning Petition, an integrated series of proposed changes to the Cambridge Zoning Ordinance, which would:

- ▶ *Encourage Housing*
- ▶ *Adjust Amount of Development Allowed*
- ▶ *Establish Project Review*
- ▶ *Revise Parking Requirements*

In the fall of 1997, City Manager Robert W. Healy appointed the Citywide Growth Management Advisory Committee (CGMAC) to address concerns expressed by the community about:

- Future density and traffic growth.
- The need for more housing, including affordable units.
- Opportunities for public review of large projects.

CGMAC—with its representatives from neighborhoods, businesses, the City, and institutions—has been meeting twice a month since 1998 with the goal of recommending zoning changes that would help tackle these problems.

Since the winter of 1999, the Planning Board, working with CGMAC, has been considering growth management zoning proposals, with over a dozen meetings dedicated to the topic.

In addition, the City Council held roundtables in March and May of this year to discuss these issues.

Several zoning changes have already been recommended by the Planning Board and adopted by City Council: “inclusionary” zoning to require a percentage of affordable units in larger housing projects (March 1998), zoning to protect backyard open space (July 1999), and zoning to allow housing in all districts of the city (June 2000).



Ongoing Community Participation

Throughout the growth management process, CGMAC, the Planning Board, and the Community Development Department have continued to seek input from all sectors of the community. A series of workshops was held to explore growth management issues.

- Backyards (June, 1998)
- Transitions (October, 1998)
- Goals and Vision (February, 1999)
- Scenarios (March, 1999)
- Policy Background (April, 1999)
- Draft Zoning Proposals (January, 2000)
- Revised Zoning Proposals (June, 2000)

Shaping the Vision

This vision for the future of Cambridge was expressed in public workshops in 1999 during which residents rated community goals outlined in Toward a Sustainable Future, the City's 1993 growth policy document. The Planning Board and Citywide Growth Management Advisory Committee also participated in reaffirming this view of how the city should evolve.

Vision

The vision seeks to build upon the features that make Cambridge a special place:

- A richly diverse population.
- An intermixture of living and work.
- Diverse neighborhoods with access to jobs, open space, and shopping.

- Traffic growth restrained.
- Continued appropriate economic development.
- The scale and character of the city and of its neighborhoods preserved.
- An on-going public voice in development.

Goals and Objectives

These goals and objectives are intended to implement the vision:

- Encourage a mix of uses to enhance vitality.
- Promote transit-oriented development.
- Facilitate residential use and affordable housing.
- Encourage appropriate retail uses.
- Work for the creation of new open space.
- Lower allowed density and bulk for non-residential uses across the city.
- Reduce traffic growth and traffic impacts.
- Urge institutions to house their graduate students, develop in core campuses, and control parking.
- Require design review and public input for large projects.



► *Encourage Housing*

Cambridge is a leader nationwide in providing a variety of affordable housing opportunities. However, the community is experiencing a serious shortage of affordable housing. Given the continuing high demand for housing at all market levels, residential use is desirable. Fortunately, residential use also produces less peak hour traffic than most non-residential uses.

Zoning revisions that encourage housing are consistent with the community's overall vision and with the desire to support a diverse population, provide an intermixture of living and work space, and increase affordable housing opportunities.



ZONING PROPOSALS

The Planning Board proposes the following zoning revisions to encourage housing.

- 1) Rezone 17 commercial districts to housing districts. (see page 4).
- 2) Facilitate conversion of industrial and commercial buildings to housing by allowing more units and by permitting open space to reflect existing conditions.
- 3) Adjust allowed floor area ratios to encourage housing over other uses (see page 5).



Background on Proposals

There are already important zoning tools in place:

- Inclusionary zoning, which requires developers of larger residential buildings to include 15% affordable units in their projects, was adopted by City Council in March 1998.
- Incentive zoning, also referred to as “linkage,” requires certain non-residential developments to provide \$3.28 per square foot to the Cambridge Affordable Housing Trust. This requirement was adopted by the City Council in 1988; a new “nexus” study is underway to revisit the level of financial contribution.
- A zoning revision allowing housing where previously prohibited — Industry A, Industry B, B-1, B-2 and Industry C — was adopted in June 2000.

Proposal to Rezone 17 Commercial Districts to Housing Districts

Seventeen commercial and industrial areas are recommended for rezoning so that, in most cases, housing is the only permitted non-institutional use. This zoning revision will establish a clear policy that future building in these areas should be housing.

Creation of new residential districts is the most direct way in which zoning can encourage the production of new housing units. The particular districts were selected because of the likelihood or appropriateness of housing creation in these areas.

Existing commercial and industrial uses would be grandfathered but could not expand without a use variance. Institutional uses would still be permitted. In many of the new residential districts, retail services would be permitted in limited amounts at street level to serve new residents.

Areas Proposed for Rezoning to Residential Districts

- A. North Point
- B. Industry B-1 at Binney St.
- C. Industry A-2 at Cambridge & 1st St.
- D. Industry A-1 along Charles St. & along 2nd St.
- E. Office 3A at ComGas & DOT Sites
- F. MXD District
- G. Industry B along Main St.
- H. Special District 8 in Cambridgeport
- I. Office 1 along Broadway
- J. Business A between Cambridge St. & Gore St.
- K. Industry A-1 along Richdale Ave.
- L. Industry A along Sherman St.
- M. Industry A-1 along Rindge Ave. at Jerry's Pond
- N. Industry A-1 along Concord Ave.
- O. Business A-1 on Mt. Auburn St.
- P. Office 2 on Concord Ave.
- Q. Office 2 in Alewife Triangle at Cambridgepark Drive



► *Adjust Amount of Development Allowed*

A key concern driving the growth management process is how much and what kind of new construction should be allowed. This proposal would reduce the allowable amount of development for everything except residential use in order to restrain traffic growth, limit excessive bulk, and encourage housing.

To understand these zoning proposals, it is essential to understand a basic aspect of zoning: “density.” One measure of density is “floor area ratio,” which is the ratio of building area to land area. A floor area ratio (FAR) of 1 on a lot allows the same amount of building area as land area; FAR of

2 allows twice the amount of building area as land area; etc.

ZONING PROPOSALS

The following three changes are proposed.

1) FAR Adjustments

Reductions are proposed for commercial, industrial and other non-residential FARs. These adjustments would not apply to low-density zoning districts.

No FAR reductions are proposed for residential uses so that they may compete more effectively for sites.

The floor area allowed would be reduced by about a third overall, with reductions varying among districts from no change, to as much as a 50% reduction (see pages 6 – 7).

- Reductions of approximately 33% are proposed in several non-residential districts.
- Deeper FAR reductions of about 43 – 50% are proposed where needed to address traffic concerns.
- More moderate FAR reductions of about 17 – 20% are proposed where districts are close to transit.
- No commercial FAR reductions are proposed where districts are close to transit.

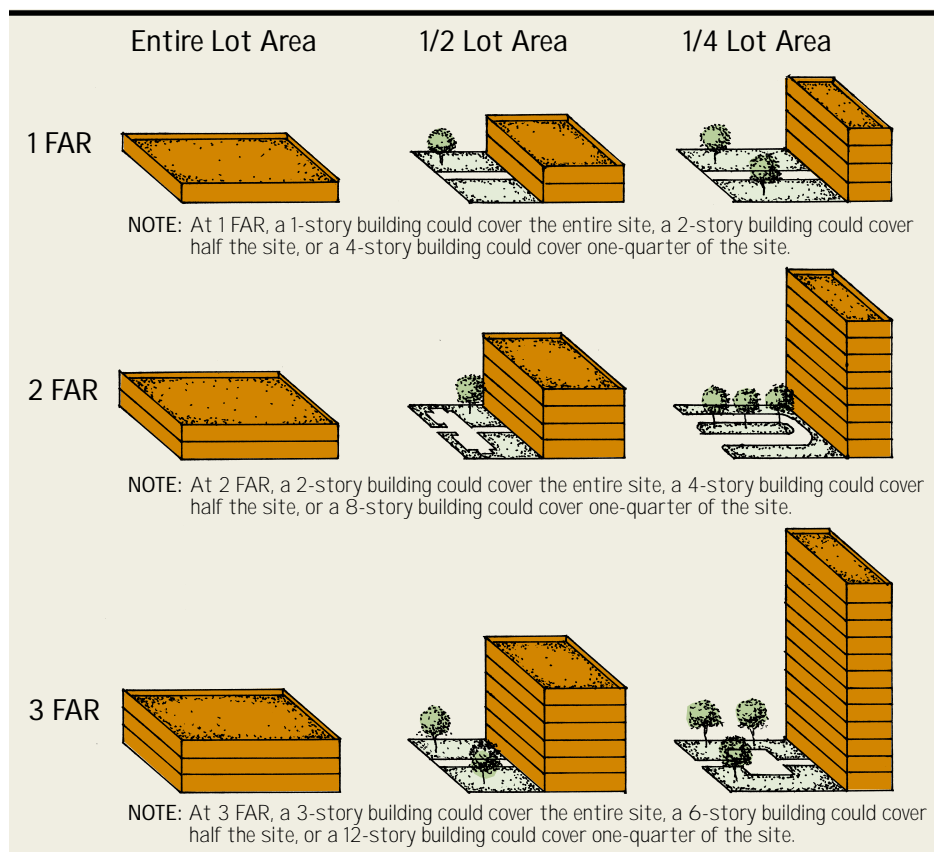
The proposed FAR reductions would cut traffic growth approximately in half. Further, if FARs were not changed, traffic conditions would become significantly worse at many intersections.

2) Structured Parking

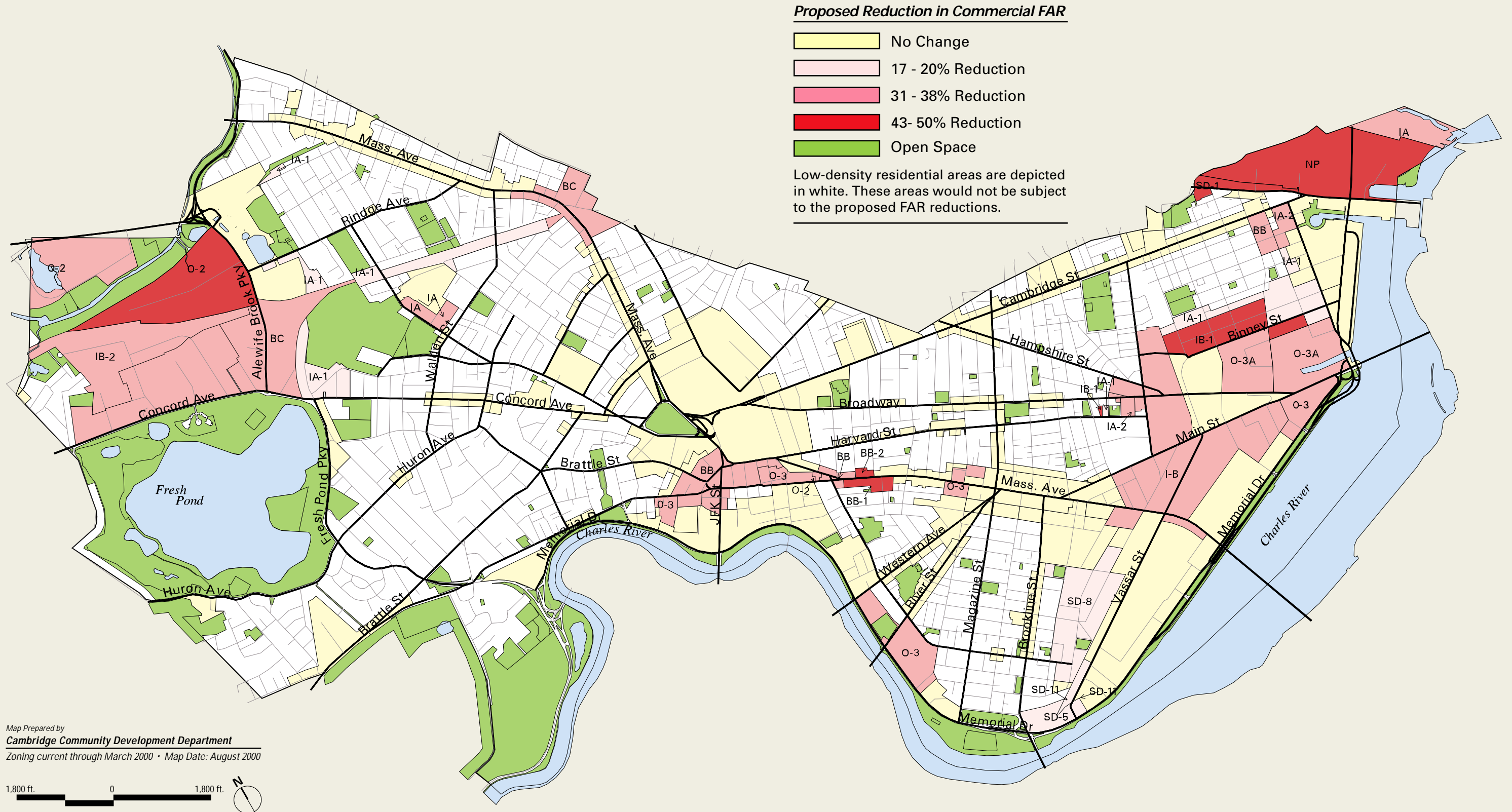
Aboveground structured parking would count as FAR, so that the actual bulk of a building could be reasonably anticipated.

3) Rooftop Mechanicals

New limits are proposed on the amount and height of rooftop mechanical equipment.



Proposed Reduction in Amount of Commercial Development Allowed (FAR)



► *Establish Project Review*

Until the recent Interim Planning Overlay Permit was established in September 1988, the Zoning Ordinance mandated design review only for a few districts of the city. As a result, many large projects were not reviewed by the Planning Board. A major goal of the growth management effort is to create a permanent requirement for traffic and design review, citywide.

ZONING PROPOSAL

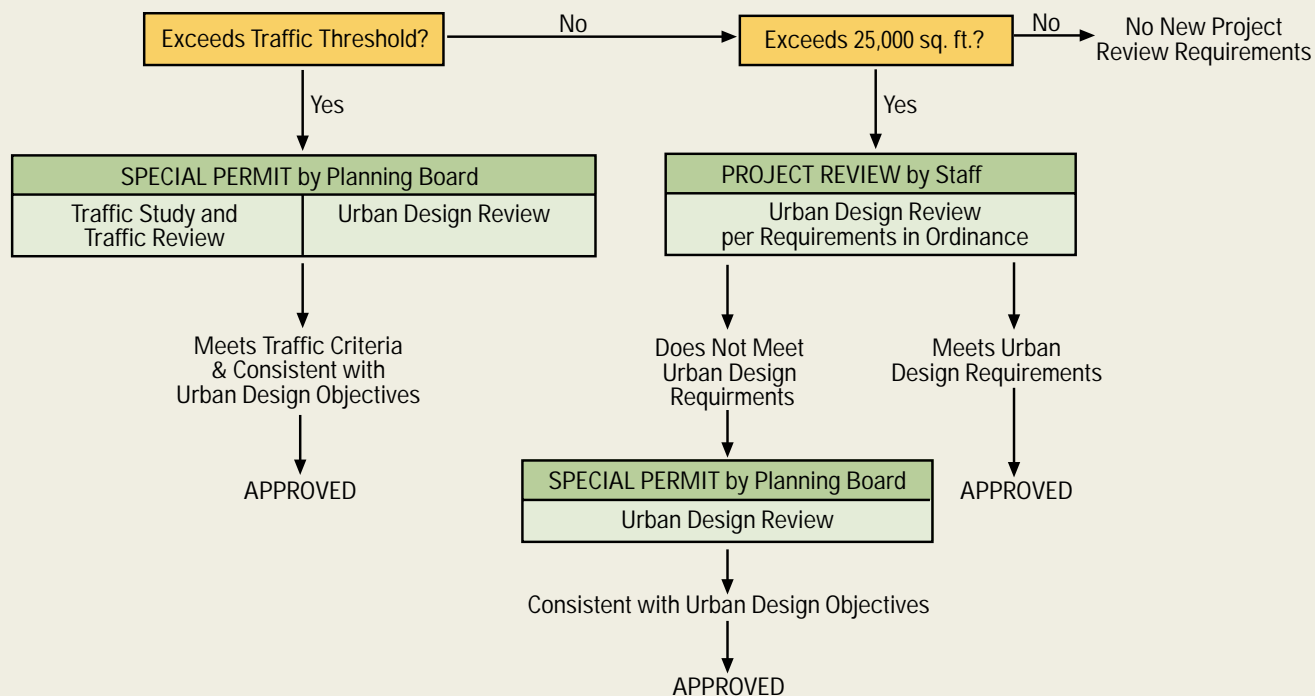
The proposal establishes two new procedures:

1) A special permit from the Planning Board would be required where a building exceeds a threshold determined by the amount of traffic the proposed use would generate. The special permit would be issued only after a traffic study is done, mitigation measures have been determined, and consistency with urban design objectives has been demonstrated.

2) A new advisory procedure would be established for buildings of 25,000 square feet or more where traffic thresholds are not exceeded. These buildings would be reviewed administratively by city staff with the opportunity for the general public to comment. If the project is not able to comply with the urban design requirements, a special permit would be required.

These procedures would not apply in the city's low-density residential zoning districts.

Proposed Citywide Project Review



► *Revise Parking Requirements*

Recent experience indicates that current zoning allows excessive parking for office and research & development uses, which are significant traffic generators in the city. The proposal is to lower the amount of parking allowed, with the goal of having less parking built, and thus less traffic generated. These provisions are intended to encourage non-auto travel and to reduce traffic impacts.

ZONING PROPOSAL

Adjustments are proposed to the minimum and maximum amount of parking required for general office and research & development uses. These uses are expected to account for most new peak hour commuter trips into the city. To avoid oversupply of

parking, a special permit from the Planning Board will be required to exceed any parking maximum established in the Ordinance.

Background on Proposal

The City of Cambridge has established many initiatives to reduce automobile traffic. Through the Vehicle Trip Reduction Ordinance in 1992, the City is working to create viable transportation options for bicyclists, pedestrians, and all types of commuters.

To encourage non-auto travel, the City has made significant investments in improved infrastructure, such as bicycle lanes, sidewalks, traffic signals, and street furniture.

At the same time, to reduce automobile traffic generated by

their employees, private employers have been required to facilitate ridesharing, to provide transit subsidies and employee shuttles, and to market alternative travel options. Such measures have been requirements of special permits for some projects since the late 1980s, and since 1998 have been required under the city's Parking and Transportation Demand Management Ordinance (PTDM).



Other Initiatives

While the Citywide Rezoning Petition addresses a wide range of zoning issues, other changes to the Zoning Ordinance are being studied.

Transitions

The Citywide Growth Management Advisory Committee identified several lower density residential areas abutting higher density districts, with the potential for larger buildings to overshadow the residential areas. The need for better transitions between districts is being analyzed in the following areas:

- Hammond/Gorham Streets
- Banks Street
- Putnam/Western Avenues
- Portland/Main/
Cardinal Medeiros Streets.

In addition to these special studies, transitions are given attention in the new urban design standards for Project Review.

Further Study

In the future, the Planning Board and city staff may study additional measures such as incentives for green building design, tools to encourage open space creation, a process for review of university master plans, and transfer of development rights.



How You Can Stay Involved

The Planning Board submitted the Citywide Rezoning Petition to the City Council in September 2000.

As these proposals move through the public review processes at the Planning Board and the City Council, the public is encouraged to engage in the discussion about how zoning can help shape the future of Cambridge.

The full text of the City's Rezoning Petition can be obtained from the City Clerk, City Hall, telephone: 349-4620.

See our web site at
www.ci.cambridge.ma.us/~CDD



A series of public reviews will take place this fall:

Planning Board Hearings

October 17, 2000

November 28, 2000

The Planning Board hearings will be held at 7:30 p.m. at the Cambridge Senior Center, 806 Massachusetts Avenue

City Council Ordinance Hearings

November 14, 2000

November 29, 2000

December 6, 2000

December 13, 2000

The City Council Ordinance hearings will be held at 4:30 p.m. at Cambridge City Hall, 795 Massachusetts Avenue.

Citywide Rezoning Workshops

To learn more, come to one of the following workshops held by the Community Development Department.

November 9, 2000

7:30 p.m.

Harrington School,
850 Cambridge Street.

December 7, 2000

7:30 p.m.

Benjamin Banneker
Charter School,
21 Notre Dame Avenue.

CITY OF CAMBRIDGE

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